In his book, the Formative period of Twelver shiism, Andrew Newman analyses early collections of the traditions of shii imams in the period of two centuries following the twelvth imams disappearance. In particular, Newman examines al-Mahasin of al- barqi, Basair al-darajat of al-Qummi and al-Kafi fi ilm al-Din of Al-Kulayni. His main contention in the book, repeated on a number of occasions is that ``these three collections differed in both style and content to meet the appropriate needs of the imami community in Qum and Baghdad'', especially with the fact that the usage of ``beleagured'' community on numerous occasions highlighting a certain psychological effect behind the hadiths narrated at the time. This review discusses Newman's arguments as well as the style of his book, concluding that the psychological state of a sect has no bearing on what hadiths are collected by its scholars.

The Holy Prophet of Islam (S), for a period of 23 years from the beginning of his prophetic mission to the moment of his death, was directly involved in the process of guidance and leadership of the people. The multifarious kinds of questions that arose for the Muslims in relation with their needs converged upon the Holy Prophet. The Prophet responded to their questions through explanations and discussions whose variety increased with the progress of Islam to the extent of enveloping all aspects of the moral, social and civic affairs of Muslims. The new society that emerged during this period was significant and important from every aspect. The Muslims who were the contemporaries of the Prophet had the advantage of personal recourse to him and chance of putting to him various questions regarding their social life. However, as long as the Prophet lived, and the source of Divine Revelation was in the midst of the Muslims, the great importance of recording his words was not fully realized. Nevertheless, soon after the Prophet's death, the Muslims realized the imminent need of recording the hadith so as to avoid the problems that would arise in the future generations. Accordingly, from the time of the first caliph, the need for recording of hadith was distinctly felt by the Muslim society. It should not remain unsaid that `Ali (A), the first Imam of the Shi`ah Muslims, had with characteristic foresight, pioneered the task of recording the Prophet's sayings during the Prophet's lifetime itself. Word for word, he wrote down what he had heard from the Prophet (S). The author of Ta'sis al-shi`ah writes:

...Know that the Shi`ah were the first to embark on collecting the records of the acts and sayings of the Prophet (S) during the era of the caliphs. They followed in the footsteps of their Imam `Ali, Amir al-Mu'minin (A), for, he had recorded and categorized the hadith during the times of the Holy Prophet. Al-Shaykh Abu al-Abbas al-Najashi, in the translation of Muhammad Ibn `Adhafar, said: "I was with Hakam ibn `Ayyinah by the side of Abu Ja`far Muhammad ibn `Ali al-Baqir (A). Hakam started asking questions with Abu Ja`far reluctantly answering them. There was a disagreement between them about one thing. Then Abu Ja`far said: "Son, get up and bring `Ali's book." He brought a big voluminous book and opened it. He looked closely in it for a while until he found the problem (which was under debate). Abu Ja`far (A) said: "This is the handwriting of `Ali and the dictation of the Messenger of Allah, upon whom be God's peace and benedictions."[1]

This tradition is in agreement with Najashi's Rijal. In addition, two other sources confirm the contents of the abovementioned hadith.[2]

The recording of hadith among the Sunnis started from the early second century when the Umayyad caliph `Umar ibn `Abd al-`Aziz ordered their collection and compilation.[3] As is widely accepted, Ibn Jurayj was the first person to record and compile hadith among the Sunnis.[4]

Here it is worth mentioning that apart from the Household of the Prophet (S), their Shi`ah followers preceded the Sunnis in their effort to record the hadith. Abu Rafi` was the first man to begin the task along with the members of the Prophet's Household (A). However, there were also several others who took up this task at the time of Abu Rafi`, or after him. Among them were: `Ubayd Allah ibn Abi Rafi`, `Ali ibn Abi Rafi`, Salman al-Farisi, Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, Asbagh ibn Nubatah and others.

Indeed,Newman attempts to make the point that certain hadiths put forward in the collections, for example in al- mahasin of al- Barqi, were placed there to help remove the discontentment of the shia of the time and increase morale;;

``Al- mahasin could only have encouraged an embattled and isolated

community in its faith and its struggle for survival in the brief interlude

before al-qaim's return.''[5]

This is once again proposed in his analysis of the context of Basair al-Darajat;

``This present chapter suggests that Basair, if useful in discussions of the

possible essences of the faith, was also very much a compilation produced

in the context of the continuing precarious political and the spiritual

position of this shi-city state.''[6]

Such a conclusion is made even though Newman states earlier that the al-mahasin in the hands of people today is incomplete and therefore what is proposed can only be speculation;

``a collection of traditions of which it has been suggested that between

to one-seventh remain. Although this incompleteness hampers definitive

conclusions as to the compilors intentions for his collection, informed

speculation is possible based on what does remain from, and is known of,

the original.''[7]

Indeed , certain hadiths viewed as being solely included as a reaction to the times, in al- Mahasin, as well as al-basair, are merely the re-stating of principles of faith in the Shiite belief. As an emple, Newman discusses hadiths alluding to the close relationship between God and the Shiites;

``In four traditions, the third narrated via Ali b. Abi hamza, the imams

alluded to a pre-existential world, in which Allah agrees with the Shia,

when they existed in the form of particles, a pact in which they pledged

their affection for the Imams.''[8]

Such a hadith is one that was reported in the times of the first eleven Imams, especially in the period of the fifth and sixth imam, when the shia had more freedom and higher morale than they had previously experienced. Futhermore, in this particular hadith, newman translates `walaya' for the iamas as affection. The use of the term affection may indeed a period of a need for emotional upliftment. However, wilaya is the belief in the Guardianship of the Imams and the necessity of allegiance and not affection for the. Many muslims, both sunni and Shiite, had or have affection for the imams, but not all of them paid allegiance and recognised them as the guardians of God's law on earth. Therefore, such a hadith only reiterates a tenant of faith, and not a need for a moral upsurge.

Indeed, Newman views certain hadiths as being extra-ordinary when conveying a picture on the positions of the imam, and therefore believes that this must be to help them recharge in those difficult times.

``The extraordinary manner in which Basairs traditions depicted the imams

as having received their knowledge was no less remarkable than the

extent of that knowledge.''

Such terms as remarkable and extraordinary are relative . What one may see as extraordinary another may be accustomed to or may view as relatively normal. Shiites throughout history have never doubted that their imams possess such abilities. Newman states, that al-Saffars traditions reminded the faithful that, in addition to possessing unique knowledge, given from unique sources, the epersons of the Imams and their followers were singular[9], as well as encouraged believers in the besieged Qummi city-state.[10] Indeed, these `extraordinary hadiths' are part and parcel of sermons delivered in the Shiite world until today.When delivered, the aim is not necessarily the helping of a beleaguered group of people, but rather reaffirming the status of holysaints.

Moreover, a seemingly contradictory state of affairs , it may be argued occur in Newman's reasoning on the Shiis community assumption of the return of the twelfth Imam.

``Indeed, within a few more years, with the concept of the future imam

as qaim well established, there was the expectation that the imam

himself would reappear shortly;''[11]

Furthermore, he states

``Basair's apparent failure to address the nature and length of the

occultation of the Imams, let alone mention more than five times

the final number of the Imams as twelve, asks of al-Saffar more

than he intended.''[12]

Once more, the search for number twelve is examined;

``It seems problematic to suggest that the notion of the final number as

twelve, let alone the supporting traditions, were not available''[13]

Two points must be noted here. The first is that since the time of the prophet, it was recognised that there would be twelve caliphs after the Prophet in both Sunni and Shiite texts.[14] These caliphs were known as Imams in the Shiite world. Of the utmost importance for twelvers is the belief that the final Imam,, al-Qiam will be in occultation until his Lord pleases in the same way as Jesus the son of Mary. To mention on 12 on only five occasions, as Newman argues, is not even necessary in itself for a twelver as such a belief is inherent. Furthermore, the belief that al-Qaim will return shorly is not a negative point when arguing belief, and indeed is once again relative. Today, were such a question to be posed to the Shiite world, the answer would be that the qiam would return shortly. In the same way, were one to ask believers in that era, they would also pray and believe that he would have come shortly as well, for his role in every era is to spread justice, a characteristic needed by all at every time. Therefore, when Newman argues that al-saffar too suscribed to the belief in the resumption of the succession process[15], it does not add anything to his argument relating to the politics of the time and the psychology of the Shiite nation.

Moreover, Newman himself recognises that ,al- mahasin for example, has 2606 traditions which focus on precepts,indeed practical aspects of community life, with examples from the lives of the Imams. Here, one may argue, such stress is placed to accustom the people of the time with the method of conducting their affairs in the absence of the Imam, by focusing the hadiths on example of the previous Imams, again in contrast to Newman's statement that they thought he would be returning imminently.

Newman analyses what he terms as Kulayni's twenty years of residence[16] in Baghdad as a response to traditionalist discourse which was increasingly predominating among the elite of Qum. However, Shekh al- Tusi, narrates that Kulayni only spent two years or so in Baghdad. Furthermore, while one may argue that al-kafi was certainly a reply to much of Bukhari's statements on theological beliefs in islam, it is not as Newman tries to portray, an amalgamation of Shiite and Mutazilite belief or a creation of an alliance.. There is no precedent in Islamic history, of the Shiites having to mingle with their principles in order to please the ruling party.Finding a common ground does not mean one is building a bridge or forsaking his beliefs. What al- Kulayni clearly does is that he concentrates on ensuring that the people recognised reason as an essential prerequisite to iman. Furthermore, in line with the hadiths of the Imams of ahlul Bayt, and not specifically with conditions of Qum and Baghdad, he puts forward a structure that presents reason as the source of knowledge but also the fountainhead of moral strength. Indeed traditions, 12, 18, 19 , 20 and 22 re-affirm this idea of practical reasoning.[17]

Moreover, Mutaharri analyses the difference between the movement of shii hadith literature in general and al-kafi in particular- shedding light that discussions and analysis in this line are not politically motivated but rather stem from a constant need to examine and review;

``The Shiite kalam, on the one hand, emerges from the core of Shiite hadith,and,on the other, is mixed with Shiite philosophy. We have seen

how in the early centuries, kalam was considered to be inimical to the sunnah and the hadith by the ahlul sunnah. But the Shiite kalam not only does not come into conflict with the sunnah and the hadith, it is firmly rooted in the sunnah and the hadith. The reason is that the Shiite hadith, in contrast to the sunni corpus on hadith, consists of numerous traditions in which profound metaphysical or social problems have been dealt with logically and analysed rationally. But in the sunni corpus, such analytic treatment of these subjects is missing. For instance, if there is any mention of such problems as that of Divine providence and predetermination, divine names, attributes, imama, khilapha, there is no argument or rational explanation of the topics mentioned. But in shia corpus on hadith all such issues have been dealt with in a rational and discursive manner. A comparison between the list of the chapters in of the six sihah and that of al-kulaynis al-kafi will make this quite clear.''[18]

Therefore, the movement towards rational discussion and argument does not reflect a politically orientated move, but rather the continuing evolution in the work and thoughts of Shiite scholars throughout history, in clear contrast to what Newman describes as an ``overt acknowledgement of prevalence in the city of rationalist discourse''[19]. Furthermore, this over-reliance on the discourse of Qum and Baghdad and their particular political conditions does not seem to be analysed in light of the fact that Kohlberg[20], amongst others, have quoted Sheikh al- mufid as saying;

``from the time of ali to that of al-hasan al-askari the imams composed

400 books called usul. These books were said to have been composed

by 400 disciples of the Imams.''

Hadiths focusing on reason, rationalist discourse, qualities of the holy imams, were all prevalent throughout these writings, especially in political conditiond, during the times of the fifth and sixth imams, which suited, the Shiites and which saw them on a moral high.

In conclusion, Newman presents an argument that focuses on the development of Shiite hadith as one closely related to the psychological state of the people, be they the people of Qum or Baghdad. Many statements are made that are of a relative nature, and certain arguments are presented that are from the telescope of an orientalist and not from the microscope of a Shiite, especially concerning the number 12 or the position of an imam. On occasions, he goes into such minute details that are often exhaustive and repetitive. Furthermore, for a book that consists of 222 pages, it would not be unfair to say he may have concluded in the thirties.Finally, at seventy pounds, you may have to question why.

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[1] *Ta'sis al-Shi`ah,* p. 279. See also Husayn ibn Muhammad Taqi Nuri al-Tabarsi, *Fasl al-khitab,* pp.5-7; 1298.

[2] *A`yan al-shi`ah,* vol. I, p.274; *Da'irat al-ma'arif al-Imamiyyah,* p.70; *`Ilm al-hadith;* Dhahabi, *Tadhkirat al-huffaz,* p.10.

[3] *Da'irat al-ma'arif al-Imamiyyah,* p.69. *Tadrib al-rawi. Kashf al-zunun,* p. 637.

[4] *Kashf al-zunun,* p.637. *Ta'ssi al-shi`ah,* pp.278-279.

[5] Newman, A.J, The formative period of twelver shiism, P60

[6] Ibid, p67

[7] Ibid, p52

[8] Ibid, p55

[9] Ibid, 78

[10] Ibid, p81

[11] Ibid, p59

[12] Ibid, p84

[13] Ibid, p85

[14] see Sahih al- Bokhari as well as Yanabeeul-mawadda

[15] Newman, as cited, p85

[16] Ibid, p95

[17] Usul al- Kafi, vol1, p13-16

[18] Martyr Murtadha Mutaharri, work translated by Ali Quli Qarai, published in al- Tawhid , vol11, No.2, 1405

[19] Newman, as cited, p98

[20] Kohlberg, Al-Usul Al-Arbaumia, Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam,10, 1987